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ABSTRACT

A nationwide interest in master-teacher plans has arisen as a response to the general malaise in education, but the viability of such plans depends on finding answers to certain crucial problems. Some basic issues must be addressed before master teachers can even be identified: whether a heirarchy of teachers should be established, or prior conditions be met for appointing master teachers, or a maximum number of master teachers per district be set. Master teachers have generally been recognized through their superior knowledge of the subject, as well as for their teaching skills and ability to command respect. Tests can accurately determine a teacher's knowledge of the subject area; teaching skills may be measured against predetermined school objectives, with professional teams judging teachers' performance; ability to work with others (command respect) can be guaged by a comprehensive file on teachers. The much-discussed criteron of producing demonstrable results in students is difficult to measure with public school populations, and so should be suspended until it can be more accurately and fairly measured. Once master teachers are identified, local districts must consider contract provisions for special roles in school programs and special compensation. Moreover, school districts must cooperate with government and university in funding and training for master-teacher plans. (JW)

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Master Teachers

Richard W. Moore

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Master Teachers

by
Richard W. Moore

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Introduction

Interest in master teacher plans has surfaced in response to recent national reports that claim there has been a deterioration in the quality of teachers entering the profession and an inability to attract and retain highly talented individuals in teaching. Master teacher proposals are an effort to attract highly talented individuals to teaching and to keep them there. In addition, there is a desire to recognize and reward excellent teachers already in the system. By increasing the quality of teachers, the expectation is that teaching will once again be a honored profession and that highly talented teachers will remain in teaching.

Master teacher plans do exist. Some have been implemented on a limited basis in local school systems and some on a statewide basis. The major features of such plans include a career ladder or series of ranks leading to the rank of master teacher and a system for identifying master teachers or intervening ranks using tests of subject matter knowledge, demonstrated teaching skill, and the ability to work with students and colleagues. Other issues that arise in implementing a master teacher plan include whether a rank is situation specific, whether access to the ranks should require a waiting period before application, whether teachers should be reexamined periodically for retention in a rank, whether there should be a limit on the number of teachers in each rank, how master teachers and those at other ranks should be utilized, and what financial and other incentives should be established for the various ranks. All these issues will be discussed in this fastback.

Before beginning this discussion, the writer reminds the reader that there are many excellent teachers in our schools. These are the highly

talented teachers who dedicate their lives to the growth and development of our children and youth, and do so with great care and skill for pitifully small salaries. Collectively they represent a tremendous strength and resource in our school systems. Indeed, these are the teachers who will fill the initial ranks of master teachers if such plans are implemented.

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Why So Much Concern With Master Teacher Plans?

The idea of the master teacher is not a new one. There have been "lead" teachers and "head" teachers for a long time. There are elementary schools that still have a head teacher rather than a principal, and these head teachers perform some of the functions currently proposed for master teachers. The recent spate of attention to the idea of the master teacher has been fueled by several recent events. One was the proposal for a master teacher plan for the state of Tennessee; one was the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education appointed by Secretary of Education Terrel H. Bell; and another was the release of a report by the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy. All three of these events occurred within the first five months of 1983, and all three speak to the need to recognize master teachers in some way. Various states and individual school districts are proposing master teacher plans; and the two major teacher organizations, the NEA and AFT, are requesting to have their input into these plans. Additional commissions and task forces have been appointed to study issues related to master teacher plans. For example, there is a Congressional Task Force on Merit Pay, and the Association of Teacher Educators has appointed a Task Force on Master Teachers.

Why is there so much concern with master teacher plans? If change in education is really necessary, is a master teacher plan the answer? Part of the answer to these questions is alluded to in the introduction to

the Commission on Excellence report, *A Nation at Risk*, which begins with these statements:

> Our nation is at risk . . . the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. . . . If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves.[1]

That is strong language — almost frightening. The commission might be accused of using scare tactics if it were not for the fact that the members of the commission are people with long-standing reputations in the education profession, who would not be expected to reach such conclusions lightly. The commission made five major recommendations with implementing recommendations for each. Two of the seven implementing recommendations dealing with teaching were concerned with identifying and using master teachers.

The Twentieth Century Fund Task Force also reports trouble in our system of education "by almost every measure" and recommends establishment of a national program for recognizing master teachers, rewarding them, and encouraging them to remain in the classroom.[2]

Master teacher plans have been proposed in Tennessee, Virginia, Arizona, and elsewhere. Two states, California and Florida, have enacted laws providing for additional pay for outstanding teachers, called "associate master teachers" and "master teachers" in Florida and "mentor teachers" in California. In addition, many other states and local school districts are considering various plans to recognize good teaching.[3]

There seems to be a widespread feeling that there is a sickness in education in America. Teachers are accused of being mediocre. Students' aptitude and achievement test scores are dropping. Settling for the minimum requirement seems to have replaced striving for the highest standard. In a recent Gallup Poll, two-thirds of respondents indicated that students are not given enough work. Third on the list of the biggest problems in the public schools was poor curriculum/poor standards. Fifth and sixth on the list of biggest problems were the difficulty of getting good teachers and teachers' lack of interest.[4] In this same poll,

one-third of respondents indicated that they would not want their child to become a teacher; the reasons given were led by low pay, discipline problems, and a thankless low-prestige job.

Proposals for master teacher plans and merit pay are a response to this sickness in education. Their intent is to improve the quality of the pool of teachers and the image of the profession, to retain good teachers, and to improve instruction in the classroom and the performance of students. Indeed, according to the Education Commission of the States Task Force on Education plan called *Action for Excellence*, released 22 June 1983, the governors want to "express a new and higher regard for teachers" and "find new ways to honor teachers." At the same time, the governors expressed a desire to "examine and tighten procedures for deciding which teachers to retain and which to dismiss."[5] As Governor Lamar Alexander of Tennessee has said, "no state public school system pays one teacher one penny more for doing a good job teaching."[6] Of course, there have been merit pay plans before, but now there is an attempt to provide merit pay to master teachers on a statewide basis. The sensitive and controversial issue of merit pay is inextricably tied to master teacher plans.

Issues in Identifying Master Teachers

The concepts of master teacher, career ladders, and merit pay are difficult to separate. Plans being proposed and those that have been enacted into law have elements of all of these concepts. Albert Shanker, the president of AFT, recognized this in his essay, " 'Master Teacher' Idea Won't Work," in which merit pay received at least as much attention as the idea of a master teacher.[7] But Governor Alexander speaking about the master teacher plan proposed for Tennessee stated, "We have commissions on merit pay, discussions on merit pay. But I don't propose merit pay."[8] Nevertheless, it is understandable that discussions of master teacher plans will involve the issue of merit pay, since going through the stages to reach the rank of master teacher generally carries some additional compensation. However, the issues involved in identification of a master teacher can be separated from the compensation issue.

Identifying master teachers first invoives reaching a consensus on what characteristics constitute a master teacher and then spelling out the processes needed to certify the existence of those characteristics in the teacher. Beyond these central considerations are questions of how master teachers should be utilized, how master teacher status is maintained, what levels of remuneration are appropriate, and how many master teachers should be in a school building or school system (quotas).

Basic First Decisions

There are several issues that have a bearing on the criteria and the process for selecting master teachers. For example, if master teachers had to be reappointed each year, the criteria and process might be dif-

ferent from an appointment that was made for a lifetime. Should there be steps or ranks along the way to becoming a master teacher? Should the appointment be situation specific? What prior conditions, such as length of service in the system, must be met? Are quotas useful or needed? These issues have been raised by master teacher or merit pay plans already in existence. The answer to one question may have a bearing on the answer to another.

Most people probably would agree that selecting master teachers each year would not be feasible administratively. Furthermore, teachers would not have time to adjust to appointments that were only a year in duration. Should master teachers be selected for three, five, ten years or for life? This raises the idea of stages of career development or career ladders, or even the practice of the university system with ranks for assistant professors, associate professors, and full professors.

To use the university system would be adopting a system in which rank is retained for life. One problem with a lifetime rank is that a person may do what is necessary to obtain the rank and then stop at some time after the rank is obtained. This problem is not at all uncommon in universities and could well be carried over into the public schools if a similar ranking system were adopted there. Thus the awarding of the rank of master teacher, or any other rank along the way, would seem to be more appropriate for a term longer than one year and shorter than life. The proposed Tennessee Master Teacher Plan would have three-year intervals at the lower rank of apprentice teacher and five-year intervals at advanced ranks, with renewal of certificates every five years at the advanced ranks.[9] A plan proposed for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina would require all teachers to undergo an evaluation every three to five years, whether they plan to move up the career ladder or not.[10]

Some will object to requiring teachers to be reevaluated periodically. Others argue that if teachers are performing at the required level, it should not make any difference if reevaluation is required; and if teachers stop performing at the level required for the rank of master teacher, it does not make sense to continue them at that rank. Some proponents of master teacher plans have recommended seven-year terms. This would have the advantage of decreasing the number of

evaluations; however, a seven-year term may be too long psychologically to leave a person in a prestigious rank and then remove them from that rank. A term of three to five years would be long enough to give both the teacher and the system time to adjust and prepare for the next evaluation.

The question of steps leading to the rank of master teacher brings up the concept of career ladders. Research on career development of teachers indicates that there are discernible stages, which could be useful in identifying natural ranks.[11] Such a ranking system could be used to determine what tasks a teacher ought to be able to perform and the salary one ought to receive. Furthermore, ranks would add incentives and prestige to a profession that is sadly lacking in both at present. Such categories as neophyte, teacher, senior teacher, and master teacher might be used for the steps in the ranking system, although someone no doubt will come up with a more creative list of terms.

Another question is whether the rank of master teacher, or other ranks, is situation specific. That is, if a teacher is awarded the rank of master teacher while teaching kindergarten and moves to the fourth grade the next year, should the teacher retain the rank of master teacher? It is reasonable to expect that teachers who make a change in the level they are teaching will carry many of the personal characteristics that earned them the rank of master teacher to the new position and that they will begin to function as master teachers very soon in the new role. However, given the differences in the nature of the students, subject matter, preparation, and teaching strategies required in the new position in the example cited, the teacher making the change should be required to demonstrate ability to satisfy the criteria in the new situation. A system of ranks would be useful in this situation in that a teacher may have to drop back one or two ranks but would not have to start over in demonstrating excellence. To take another example, transferring from a fourth-grade class in one school to a fourth-grade class in another would not constitute a major change in position and should not result in the change of rank, if the transfer is within the school system having a master teacher plan.

A fourth issue is whether any prior conditions should be met before qualifying for the rank of master teacher. The answer is yes if there is a

series of steps leading to the rank of master teacher. If not, it is an open question. In the absence of intervening ranks, there might be a minimum number of years of experience as a prerequisite to application for the rank of master teacher. On the other hand, if the system of identifying master teachers is sufficiently rigorous and involves intervening ranks, a specified number of years of experience may not be necessary.

A number of researchers have identified the entry stage in teaching as the "survival" stage. At this stage the beginning teacher is more concerned with coping with problems of classroom management than in attending to individual differences in students or sophisticated teaching strategies.[12] Other research suggests a more advanced stage of teacher development in which there is a greater concern for pupils.[13] Paul Burden has found evidence for stages of teacher development that seem to be ordered and hierarchical, with each stage leading to increasing knowledge and ability.[14] If the system of identifying master teachers is able to distinguish teachers at the advanced stages, then a minimum number of years of teaching would not be required prior to applying for the position of master teacher or any intervening rank.

Another question that will likely generate a considerable amount of controversy in any master teacher plan is how many master teachers should a school or school district have? Answers to this question range from about 10% to 30%. Governor Alexander expects his plan to result in 40% of teachers with six or more years of experience to become senior or master teachers.[15] Helen Pate-Bain, former president of the NEA, says she wants her grandchild to have only master teachers in the classroom, and suggests granting tenure only to those who qualify as master teachers.[16] However, not all professors are full professors, not all boy scouts become eagle scouts; and it is not likely that all teachers will be master teachers, nor is it likely that they will want to be.

Whether teachers seek to advance to the rank of master teacher may depend on whether they want to do the things a master teacher is required to do. Some of the suggestions for utilization of master teachers include a provision for extended contracts to cover 11 months for curriculum planning and non-teaching activities while students are not in school, providing assistance to beginning teachers or others who need it, and serving on teacher evaluation committees. Some teach-

ers don't want those kinds of responsibilities or commitments. When teachers in Oklahoma were asked how they felt about the House Bill 1706 requirement for teachers to perform the duties designated for the entry-year assistance program, 74% indicated they would be most comfortable providing assistance. However, only 44% would feel comfortable recommending a staff development program, and only 36% would be comfortable deciding if a first-year teacher should be retained.[17] Hence, the number of teachers who reach the rank of master teacher will probably be controlled by the particulars of the program and a self-selecting process, and should not be restricted. It is conceivable that a district may have the problem of not having enough applicants to fill the spots initially allocated for master teachers; however, this is not likely to be a persistent problem.

If the number of teachers who reach a given rank is determined by the particulars of the program, then a steady state should be achieved wherein the numbers within each rank would not vary greatly, even if applications for that rank are continuously open for both those who wish to apply for the first time and those who wish to reapply. The major problem comes in establishing the steady state. Some temporary restriction may have to be placed on the system in the first year or two. An administratively acceptable approach to this problem is to limit the number at each rank by the number of dollars available to fund the plan. This is workable whether funding is from local, state, or federal sources, and allows for phasing in the plan.

A system of ranks, and open access to them, would help to overcome the problem of attracting and retaining outstanding and talented persons in the profession. The prospect of becoming a master teacher only after 20 years of service is not much of an enticement to 20-year-olds choosing a profession. But with open access to ranks, the only limiting factor would be the time required to prepare for the evaluation. Realistically, it is unlikely there will be a large number of beginning teachers at the higher ranks. In a study of characteristics of master teachers, Jean Easterly asked teachers to identify master teachers from their own ranks. Only one of the teachers identified as a master teacher had between five and nine years of experience; all the rest had more than nine years of experience.[18]

Characteristics of Master Teachers

What are the characteristics of master teachers that should be used as a basis for identification or selection? Most adults, if asked, could identify outstanding teachers they have had. Most principals will tell you who are their best teachers. Parents have opinions about teachers and call the school to ask that their child be placed with this teacher or that one. These kinds of judgments are not sufficient for selection of master teachers. Specific characteristics that are agreed on and can be reliably observed are needed. We must be able to decide in advance what data are necessary in order to make the decision.

Benjamin Bloom, in a study of master teachers of outstanding Olympic swimmers and concert pianists, found a great deal of effort was put into the selection of the teachers by their prospective students and vice versa.[19] In this study of a very few great teachers, the focus was on finding teachers with great skill and knowledge in their field and whose reputations, in part, were based on the success of their former students. (Demonstrated success was a requirement; however, their reputed teaching skill may rest on the fact that the teachers chose only those students who learned quickly and easily.) While the relationship between these few students and teachers may not be directly comparable to the relationships between teachers and students in elementary and secondary schools, there are some parallels that are useful in this discussion of characteristics of master teachers.

Bloom observed that the students have an almost reverential respect for these master teachers, and they accept the demands and expectations of the master teacher as fully justified. The master teacher in Bloom's

study constantly conveys the expectation that the student can and will excell in the field, rarely offers praise, maintains careful records of progress, and constantly looks for ways for the student to improve his performance. Indeed, performance is consistently used as the basis for improving skills and is the measure of success for both the student and the teacher. Thus, if one were looking for a master teacher on the basis of Bloom's study, one might require that the teacher 1) have a superior knowledge of the subject, 2) be skilled in teaching, 3) command respect of the student, 4) constantly nurture the student in the subject, and 5) produce demonstrable results.

Knowledge of the subject is usually the first qualification brought up when people discuss the requirements for great teachers. Their reasoning is, "One cannot teach what one does not know." Knowledge of the subject and of a general nature are required by accrediting bodies and certification agencies for teacher preparation programs. In a growing number of states, passing tests of subject matter knowledge and general knowledge are required for teacher certification.[20] Beginning teachers are expected to have taken courses that develop knowledge of the subject matter and of a general nature. But since we are looking for characteristics of master teachers, it is reasonable to expect that they would demonstrate a level of knowledge of the subject matter and knowledge of a general nature above that of the entering teacher. The first criterion for selecting master teachers is demonstrated knowledge of the subject matter and general knowledge.

Skill in teaching also is near the top of most lists of characteristics of master teachers. Most people have some difficulty separating the great teacher's skill from dedication, for the two seem to go hand in hand. When we remember the great teacher, we remember how dedicated, sincere, and truly devoted that teacher was. However, we must separate the two characteristics if we expect to have reliable instruments for observing either one of them. Demonstrated teaching skill must certainly be the second criterion for selection to the high office of master teacher.

The criteria of commanding respect of the student and constantly nurturing the student in the subject matter, which were identified in Bloom's study, should probably be broadened since we expect master teachers in the public schools to work effectively with the larger popula-

tion. The criterion might be: to demonstrate the ability to work effectively with students and colleagues. (Bloom's master teachers had very few students and no colleagues in the classroom.) The scope of this criterion would depend on how it is defined operationally. For example, it could deal with dedication to teaching, philosophy of life, moral considerations, and personality traits as perceived by students, colleagues, and administrators. This is unquestionably the most difficult criterion to assess with reliability; and if all of the above elements are included, it will certainly be the most controversial. The first task for establishing assessment procedures for this criterion is to gain consensus from the largest possible population as to what qualities will be assessed. Indeed, it makes no sense whatever to establish assessment procedures for any of the criteria without such a consensus. Based on this consensus, the third criterion for selection of master teachers is demonstrated ability to work with students and colleagues.

The last criterion from Bloom's study is the ability to obtain demonstrable results. The master teachers in Bloom's study had the luxury of selecting students who gave evidence that they would be able to learn quickly. This criterion does not translate well to the larger sector. Public schools do not have the freedom to be so selective. There are school systems where evaluations of teachers are made on the basis of student achievement gains. It may be that such evaluations will be useful for the selection of master teachers. However, this writer's recommendation is that this criterion be put on the back burner until master teacher plans have been more widely implemented and refinements of procedures are sought.

Bloom's work and the conclusions drawn from it are supported by other investigators and by current practice. In an interesting study of students' perceptions of characteristics of teacners, Douglas Samuels and Robert Griffore found that students identified teachers' knowledge of subject matter and ability to teach as the most important characteristics in good teachers.[21] Furthermore, this finding was consistent across samples of third-graders, fourth-graders, undergraduate students, and graduate students. Other characteristics of importance to these groups of students were fairness, enthusiasm, humaneness, and helpfulness. Thus, this study supports the categories of knowledge,

teaching skill, and effective work with students as important for "good teachers."

The state of Florida has spent a considerable amount of effort in identifying generic competencies for teacher certification and now requires teacher candidates to demonstrate competence in 23 generic competencies. The 23 competencies are grouped into five major categories: communication skills, basic knowledge, technical skills, administrative skills, and interpersonal skills.[22] Florida's efforts support three of the criteria discussed earlier for identifying master teachers: 1) knowledge of the subject matter and general knowledge, 2) teaching skill, and 3) ability to work with students and colleagues. The number of categories or criteria is not important; what is important is that the criteria include the major characteristics that have been identified as necessary for a master teacher, and that selection procedures assess all of the characteristics appropriately.

Procedures for Selecting Master Teachers

The first criterion, knowledge of the subject area and general knowledge, can be tested with paper-and-pencil tests. This is a traditional and an efficient way of testing. Tests are available, and as more school systems adopt master teacher plans, tests used for this purpose will be refined and reliability will increase. The first tasks are the selection of tests and deciding on the cut-off scores for passing them. If the master teacher plan has several levels or ranks, successively higher scores might be established for passing at each rank. This is a highly sensitive issue that will have to be reexamined frequently in the early years of program implementation. With revisions in examinations, pass rates can be expected to change over time. This has happened in Florida, Georgia, and Louisiana where pass rates have increased with time.[23] Another sensitive issue is the documented differences in pass rates for blacks and whites on teacher examinations, raising charges of cultural bias.[24] One solution for dealing with this problem is establishing culture-referenced norms and providing the candidate with a number of test sections from which to choose before taking the examination.

Objections to the use of the National Teacher Examination (NTE), the most widely used test for teachers, are frequently raised. Donald L. Haefele notes that the NTE is an achievement test and that "Until research appears showing stronger relationships with practice, the practical utility of the National Teacher Examination is questionable."[25] Others believe in the utility of exams of this type. Lester Solomon supports testing in Georgia, stating, "Today we feel our testing program eliminates the ten percent or so who should not be teachers and helps the

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marginals do better."[26] Richard Simms studied the attitudes of Oklahoma teachers toward House Bill 1706, which, among other requirements, provides for testing of teachers for competence in their curriculum fields. He reported that "Seventy-five percent of the teachers felt that results of the competency examinations would not provide a good measure of the potential success of an individual's classroom performance."[27]

The belief that competency examinations for teachers are important is contradicted by survey research that casts doubt on their usefulness as predictors of success in the classroom. But such research does not investigate the necessity of the teacher's subject matter competence, which is not necessarily the same as classroom practice or performance. Skill in orchestrating the classroom is not the same thing as knowledge of subject matter. The expected outcome of competence in subject matter is what pupils learn. All the teaching skill in the world is useless unless there is knowledge to teach. Therefore, it is reasonable that teacher competence in the subject matter should be one of the criteria for the selection of teachers and certainly for selection of master teachers.

The second criterion, demonstrated teaching skill, can be assessed in a number of ways. Haefele discusses a dozen different approaches for principals or curriculum supervisors to collect observational data on objectives acceptable to both the evaluators and the teacher.[28] There are school systems where evaluation of this type has been in use for some time, and teachers respond very favorably.[29] To expand its use to selecting master teachers should not be difficult.

An appropriate evaluation team might include a master teacher, an administrator, and a professional outside evaluator. The teacher being evaluated should be involved in setting the conditions and selecting the persons to do the evaluating. The teacher could be asked to present a portfolio of lessons and supporting materials related to a unit of instruction. A portion of the evaluation would focus on the quality of the materials presented. The teacher also would be evaluated while working directly with children in the classroom for approximately one week. There should also be additional observations conducted randomly by the evaluation team.

The team would then prepare a report indicating strengths and

weaknesses of what was observed and make a decision as to whether the teacher should be advanced to the next rank or to the master teacher rank. Regardless of the outcome of the evaluation, the comments of each evaluator should be used to contribute to the improvement of instruction by the teacher being evaluated.

The evaluation of teaching skill is not done easily, nor is preparation for it to be taken lightly. The teacher may spend weeks or months preparing for the evaluation team. Teachers who have done this sort of preparation report pride and satisfaction in the accomplishment and appreciation for what was achieved with students.[30]

Some researchers believe that the rating scales currently in use for evaluating teacher effectiveness are not reliable or useful sources of information. If this is the case, considerable effort directed at the development of reliable measuring devices is necessary before effective wide-scale teacher evaluation can begin. Soar, Medley, and Coker maintain that available rating scales for evaluating teacher performance are of little or no value, and that "teachers' resistance to evaluation is reasonable, if that evaluation is subjective, unreliable, open to bias, closed to public scrutiny, and based on irrelevancies." They argue for "low-inference measures of teacher performance that have been developed through research on teacher effectiveness."[31]

The third criterion, demonstrated ability to work with colleagues and students, should be assessed over a period of time. Data on the teacher's ability to work with students could be collected by the team when evaluating teaching skills. The candidate's file should also contain items such as records of conferences with administrators, master teachers, students, and parents; supporting letters from colleagues; and a record of contributions to the academic and extracurricular programs of the school. Keeping professional records of this nature may seem burdensome. However, their availability provides the evaluators with an objective source of data and removes the likelihood of pettiness when making judgments about staff. Further, a mechanism to screen out or remove unprofessional evaluative materials should be devised.

Once these assessments have been made, how do they fit together? Do they all have to result in superior ratings in order to qualify for the master teacher rank? If one evaluation is weak, should the teacher be re-

quired to be reevaluated on only that one part or on all of the parts? How long should a teacher have to wait before being reevaluated? These and many other questions will have to be settled before a plan goes into effect.

If excellence is the goal, then teachers applying for the master teacher rank should receive superior ratings on all the evaluation criteria. It does not make sense to settle for less.

Identifying and certifying master teachers or other ranks will be a time-consuming task both for the applicant and for the evaluators. Since an evaluation team will have to be identified for each applicant and the applicant will have to prepare a portfolio, the plan should specify a cut-off date for application. Even with an open access policy for applying for a rank, the selection procedure would preclude advancement in less than a semester; and budget considerations may require that appointments to a new rank be effective with the ensuing school year.

Utilizing and Rewarding Master Teachers

The title of master teacher is a bit empty without some opportunity to provide a service above and beyond the ordinary, whether in the classroom or in other ways. Once identified as master teachers, these outstanding individuals generally are eager to make substantial contributions to the educational program. Questions to be addressed in this chapter are how should master teachers be used, what steps or career ladder steps should be used in a master teacher plan, and what plan for compensation should be adopted? Most proposals for master teachers are coupled with some type of merit pay plan.

Utilizing Master Teachers

The report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education recommended that: "Master Teachers should be involved in designing teacher-preparation programs and in supervising teachers during their probationary years."[32] The Tennessee plan proposes 11- and 12-month contracts, so that the best teachers can teach gifted youngsters in small classes in the summer, assist with curriculum development, and help other teachers.[33] The Charlotte-Mecklenburg plan would have Career Level 3 teachers (the highest level) spending some time in the classroom, some time as curriculum specialists, and some time as area specialists. While all Career Level 3 teachers should be able to organize and manage research projects, some of them would spend most of their time teaching.[34] Helping beginning teachers and less effective colleagues is proposed in the California mentor-teacher plan, which the California Teachers Association has supported. But it is recommended that the mentor-teachers spend at least 60% of their time teaching.[35]

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Teacher organizations are cautious about endorsing master teacher plans that may take teachers out of the classroom. They point out that attracting talented individuals to teaching is a major problem confronting education today; removing them from the classroom is not a solution to the problem. They also point out that attaining the rank of master teacher, achieved only after several years in teaching, is not likely *to attract a talented* college student to teaching. It is understandable why teacher organizations want the master teachers to remain in the classroom. If they are the brightest and most talented, they are needed in a strong teacher organization.

Not all of the brightest and most talented individuals in teaching will want to leave the classroom. Some prefer full-time teaching, some will want a combination of duties, and some will want to move to other duties and then return to teaching later in their careers. If freedom of movement is permitted, the teaching profession will benefit by having these individuals in the classroom for whatever portion of their professional lives they choose to spend there.

Using master teachers to mentor neophytes and less effective colleagues has been suggested in many master teacher plans. However, it is unrealistic to expect that all teachers who aspire to be master teachers would want to participate in mentoring programs. Mentoring is a complex relationship, requiring a demonstrated ability to work with students and colleagues. Michael Fagan and Glen Walter have studied mentoring relationships in teaching and elsewhere.[36] They report that while about 75% of teachers in their sample were mentored to one degree or another, a good mentoring relationship cannot be forced. Thus a plan that requires all beginning teachers to be mentored must include a voluntary provision for experienced teachers, who might profit from mentoring but would resist it.

Making 11- and 12-month contracts available to master teachers is another common element in many master teacher proposals. Extended contracts would increase the attractiveness of the profession, especially for those teachers who must scramble to find employment in the summer to supplement their incomes in order to make ends meet. If the base salary of teachers were raised to be competitive with professions requiring similar preparation, and if extended contracts were available, then

the profession would become more attractive and, indeed, more of a profession. However, not all master teachers will want to take advantage of extended contracts. Some who are raising families will want to be at home during the summer months. Others may want to rest and refresh themselves over the summer in preparation for the rigors of the next school year.

Master teachers would be more receptive to the extended contract if they had some choice in assignment. Some types of teaching assignments, research projects, or curriculum development projects may be more attractive than others. Some teachers may be attracted to developing special curricula for gifted students, others to teaching the gifted, and others to researching the use of computers in the classroom. There should be an element of voluntarism in the extended contract so that the teacher has the choice of accepting or rejecting it. However, if teachers participate in identifying the projects to be completed under extended contracts, the school district is not likely to have difficulty in recruiting master teachers for assignments.

The use of teachers in planning teacher preparation programs, as proposed by the Commission on Excellence in Education, is not a new idea. It is currently underway in many teacher preparation institutions and is required in some states, such as Ohio. The standards of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education require a close working relationship between teacher educators and public schools. Identifying master teachers as the persons to participate in this cooperative venture would be welcomed by all parties concerned.

Rewarding Master Teachers

The actual rewards a school system adopts for a master teacher plan will differ according to the philosophy and financial status of the system. But there are some common elements that should be considered. Rewarding teachers simply for putting in extra hours is not a genuine reward, although admittedly master teachers usually turn out to be the ones who work hardest, who are at school before the others, and who are still in the school long after the children have left. A reward system for master teachers should be based on what they do different from,

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say, a senior teacher, and on that which takes advantage of their superior skills.

One means by which a reward for doing additional work is justified is the extended contract. Indeed, the offer of the extended contract may be a reward in itself if such offers are restricted to master teachers and if the salary for the extended contract is extrapolated from the nine-month salary.

Previously, the only way for teachers to increase their salaries was to become a principal, curriculum coordinator, or to move into some central office position. The concept of a career ladder with several ranks and salaries commensurate with those ranks would encourage teachers to stay in the classroom. Achievement of an advanced rank is a reward in itself; but if the salary schedule is tied to the ranks, then there is a justification for differential salaries.

The NEA has argued against merit pay plans in favor of retaining the single salary schedule.[37] But with a career ladder plan it is possible to have a multiple salary schedule for the various ranks in the plan. Thus the adoption of a career ladder plan that leads to master teacher rank at the top rung and with appropriate compensation at each rung appears to overcome the objections of teacher organizations to merit pay and may actually eliminate the notion of merit pay and put the profession on a more competitive footing.

Tenure

Tenure may be considered a reward, but it does not necessarily have to be tied to a master teacher plan. However, once a master teacher plan with a career ladder has been adopted, consideration of tenure inevitably follows. Who should be eligible for tenure? Most would agree that the beginning teacher should not be eligible and the master teacher should be. But if there are two intervening ranks, "teacher" and "senior teacher," should either of these be eligible for tenure? This will depend on the philosophy behind the appointment of teachers to the various ranks. For example, a district might define the rank of "teacher" in such a way that these individuals serve as support personnel for the senior and master teachers and are not eligible for tenure.

Another district may have the financial resources and the community support to retain only senior and master teachers. In any event, the decision as to which ranks are tenured depends on the standards used to define the ranks. This is an issue that should be dealt with as the standards are developed.

Another issue is whether tenure should be permanent. This is an issue over which teacher organizations will do battle to the end, because it is highly unlikely that they would accept a plan that could remove tenure from a master teacher who reached that rank on the basis of a rigorous evaluation. However, if the plan for achieving the rank of master teacher is based on a standard of excellence and if that standard is not maintained, the teacher could be dropped back to the rank of senior teacher. And if a salary schedule is adopted that ties salary to rank, the loss of rank would result in a corresponding loss of salary. Such a policy need not result in a loss of tenure, but the incentive to maintain one's rank will help ensure a continuing standard of excellence. The tenure issue as it relates to a career ladder plan is complex. Its resolution will probably rest with state legislatures and the courts.

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Other Issues in Master Teacher Plans

Once a plan for identifying and using master teachers and rewarding them appropriately is formulated, some additional issues to be considered are: How will the plan be funded? What, if any, involvement should the teacher education institutions and state departments of education have? And, once the plan is formulated, is it possible to implement it?

Involvement of Teacher Education Institutions and State Departments of Education

If the purpose of master teacher plans is to upgrade the quality of education in the state, it is reasonable to expect that the states will be involved in some way. Currently states set the certification requirements for the graduates of teacher education institutions in the state. This role could be extended by having the state department of education cooperate with the districts in setting the requirements for the various ranks in the career ladder. In practice, the state departments might set minimum standards for the various ranks for the entire state, with additional standards set by the districts.

Most of the master teacher plans being proposed have not been initiated at the state level or with statewide standards. Aggressive action by states in setting standards for career ladder and master teacher plans will likely be met with criticism because of the loss of local autonomy. Nevertheless, if the funding for master teacher plans is to come from the state, it is reasonable to expect that the state will have some role in setting the standards.

Teacher education institutions have traditionally been involved in the continuing education of teachers through degree programs and inservice activities. School districts have encouraged this involvement through salary schedules that provide increments based on completion of a certain number of graduate hours or a master's degree. But generally the school system does not dictate what coursework a teacher must take to move up on the salary schedule. That is, a chemistry teacher could take graduate courses in mathematics or elementary education and still get credit on the salary schedule. A growing expectation of the taxpaying public is that a revamped system of rewarding outstanding teachers should include graduate work that is relevant to what they are paying the teacher to teach. This means that teacher education institutions will have to develop graduate programs directed at improving teaching skills and assisting teachers in moving up the career ladder. Increasingly, school districts are going to have a say in the graduate work their teachers undertake; and teacher education institutions are going to be forced to work cooperatively with the districts. This probably is the healthiest thing that could happen to both parties.

Funding Master Teacher Plans

No master teacher plan is viable without consideration of how to fund it. Current salaries are too low to attract talented individuals, and there has not been adequate incentive to those in the profession to strive for excellence. If the pool from which master teachers are drawn is not improved, there is little chance of excellence being achieved. The problem of funding must be addressed.

While national polls indicate concern about education, a belief that teachers should be paid more, and a willingness to spend more on education, the evidence is that the taxpayer will not vote for adequate support at the local level. The remedy is not going to be found in the voting booth. Local taxes will continue to be important, but the major source of funding for developing excellence in our schools will have to come from state and federal levels.

The argument for increasing state funding is basically one of equity. The quality of education in a state should not be based on the value of

the local tax base. The same argument can be made for increasing the federal level of funding. The prospects for increased funding at the federal level are not promising. Speaking on the need for building a better teaching profession, Secretary of Education Terrel Bell did not indicate any federal responsibility but did suggest that state legislatures and governors, along with school boards and administrators, would have to do the job.[38] An opposing point of view was presented by Herbert Walberg to the U.S. House of Representatives when he told that body that a national commitment to the development of human resources is needed to restore our educational and economic success.[39] The National Commission on Excellence in Education did not address the issue of funding because it was not part of their charge. Most discussion about excellence in education and means to fund it seems to be taking place among officials at the state level. For example, a citizens' task force in Connecticut recommended that "the state increase salaries and create career ladders to recognize competence as part of an overall effort to attract and keep qualified teachers in the state."[40] Similar responses are being made by task forces in states across the country.

The fact that governors and their legislatures are involving themselves in the funding problem is a most fortunate state of affairs. They are the ones who may be able to do something about it. Many states are studying the problem and appear willing to make a commitment. Other states are having difficulty in maintaining their current funding level, and some are facing tax rollback movements. If the commitment is not shared among all states and is not a sustained commitment, the current concern for excellence in education will become wasted effort. The National Commission on Excellence in Education stated, "Excellence costs," and "Reform of our educational system will take time and unwavering commitment." In the long run, success will depend on the attitude of the nation. Only if we have refocused our values as a nation on the desirability of excellence in education, can that "rising tide of mediocrity" be turned.

Conclusion

A master teacher plan properly conceived and properly administered should contribute to developing excellence in education. Objectives for implementing a master teacher plan should include: 1) improving classroom instruction and student achievement, 2) improving the status of classroom teachers, 3) making the profession more attractive to talented individuals, and 4) providing a reward system for those already in the profession.

A master teacher plan should be based on a career ladder that differentiates among teachers in terms of their skills and abilities and the kinds of tasks they perform. The career ladder should be a two-way street with teachers being tested periodically to determine whether they should retain a rank previously earned. There should be an open-access policy for application for the various ranks in the career ladder, and teachers should be free to move from one career option to another as opportunities are available. Applicants for the various ranks in the career ladder should be tested on: 1) knowledge of the subject matter and general knowledge, 2) teaching skill, and 3) ability to work with students and colleagues. Knowledge can be tested with paper-and-pencil tests, skill should be observed by teams of competent observers, and ability to work with students and colleagues can be judged on the basis of files and records. Agreements whereby colleges supply assistance with teacher evaluation and schools provide laboratory experiences for teacher candidates will facilitate the career ladder concept. College personnel could interpret the state department of education's standards for the various ranks; the local evaluation team would interpret the local district's standards for the various ranks.

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Master teachers should teach. The first purpose of a master teacher plan should be to improve classroom instruction and student achievement. However, mentoring new teachers and less able teachers can also contribute to this objective. Other duties of master teachers might include research on a teaching method, testing a new idea in the classroom, and developing curricula.

Extended contracts should be made available as a way of making greater use of our best teachers in special classes, curriculum development, or related activities in the summer months. While master teachers should teach, they also should be afforded freedom of movement within the profession such that they may make contributions to the education program in a variety of ways.

Teachers and teacher organizations should not fear such a plan. Most of the teachers who will be identified for the advanced ranks will be those presently doing an outstanding job of teaching. A fundamental premise of the proposals presented herein is that teachers' salaries must be raised. In return, the quality of instruction in schools must rise also. This will not happen overnight. A sustained effort is required by all concerned.

There is excellence in many of our schools. There are many talented, dedicated teachers teaching our children. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence from national commissions and national polls to suggest that the public is not satisfied with the quality of education in this country. Parents counsel their children not to go into education. SAT scores have declined steadily over the past decade. The pool of strong candidates for teaching has diminished. The nation is beginning to realize there is a problem requiring attention at local, state, and federal levels. It has become a political issue in many states. The master teacher concept is one step in making the attitudes of the nation more positive toward teachers and all aspects of education and a step in reversing the "rising tide of mediocrity."

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